critical digest

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Feb 27, 1961 Vol XII No 49 The Weekly NYC Theatre Newsletter Digest Service-Published 52 weeks a year-$25 per year -

This Week in NYC

Four understudies had an opportunity to portray leading roles. Jane Romano subbed for three days for Ethel Merman, Gypsy, who went to Denver to visit her new grandchild. Frank Marin subbed at one hour's notice for David Varsi, The Tenth Man, who became ill. Former was hired last week and learned the lines just prior to curtain time. Robert Burr, the understudy, has replaced George C Scott, The Wall. Finally Jack Irwin replaced Bert Parks, The Music Man, during the latter's one week vacation.

Plays

Once There Was a Russian closed after its first and only performance at an estimated loss of $150,000... All the Way Home now gives Sun. matinee instead of Mon eve performance... Impulse, jazz show with Art Blakely's Jazz Messengers, Nina Simone, Olatunji and his Drums of Passion and an African dance group, narrated by Brendan Behan to be presented Mar 29 by Alex Cohen-Monte Kay-Andre Goulston... Get It Up a new musical with book, lyrics and music by Thomas Johnstone to be presented this spring by Charles Curran. Earlier version tested four years ago at Lambs Club... The Complaisant Lover by Graham Greene to be presented in NY in Oct by Irene Mayer Selznick, directed by Glen Byam Shaw, starring Michael Redgrave... Simone adaptation of the Bertold Brecht-Lion Feuchtwanger drama by Ben Hecht to be presented in Sept by Harry Horner... The Whole Darn Shooting Match musical postponed to next season due to death of Jack Whiting.

Theatre Record Notes

RCA Victor to record the original cast disc of How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying... MGM to release original cast disc of Carnival and also jazz LP by Oscar Peterson.

NYC Calendar

Rendezvous in Senlis-Gramercy Arts (138 E 27)-2/27. Claude Giroux-MannyAzenberg present a new Jean Anouilh play translated by Edward Owen Marsh, directed by Zeke Berlin with Russell God, Josephine Nichols, Frieda Altman.

Comedie Francaise-City Center. Tartuffe -2/28-Moliere's comedy directed by Louis Seigner. Brittanicus 3/2- Racine's tragedy directed by Michel Vitald. Le Dindon 3/7 -3/11. George Feydeau 's comedy.

The Death of Bessie Smith-York (64 & 1st)- 3/1. Theatre 1961-Richard Barr presents new short play by Edward Albee, replacing dance satire "Dominio Furioso" Directed by Lawrence Arrick with Rae Allen, John McCurry, Harold Scott.

13 Daughters- 54th St 3/2. John Silverman presents new musical with book, lyrics and music by Eaton Magoon, Jr, directed by Rod Alexander with Don Ameche, Ed Kenney, Monica Boyer.

Cry of the Raindrop- St Marks Playhouse (133-2nd Av) 3/4. Kelsey Marechal-Seymour Litvinvov present new play by Lonny Chapman directed by Robert Paschal, with Lou Antonio, June Harding, Joan Harvey.

Five Posts in the Market Place- Gate (162-2nd Av)- 3/5. Repertory Company of Gate Theatre presents new play by Algirdas Landsbergis directed by Sidney Walters with Barbara Ames.

Broadway Business

Variety grosses for the past week were generally up with musicals doing the best business. Sell-outs reported by Camelot and Do-Re-Mi , while Under the Yum Yum Tree reported lowest gross of 25% business.

Off Broadway

Two shows which were due to close remained open. Cicero moved from St Marks Playhouse to East 74th St, with Michael Del Medico replacing James Forster in the title role. "Two-for-one" tickets offered via newspaper ads. Epitaph for George Dillon extended its run after posting closing notice... Nine shows gave Washington Birthday matinees... The Premise giving Fri performances at 8 and 10 30 PM ... The Mousetrap playing Sun eve instead of Wed matinee... William Hansen and Noam Pitlik added to Roots ... Liza Loughlin to portray lead in revival of Ladies Night In Turkish Bath Mar 14 at Gould Theatre.

Mon eve showcase readings of new plays start Mar 27 at Jan Hus House presented by William Gyimes with F. N. Simpson's The Only Sense in Nonesense... A Fig Leaf in Her Bonnet a new play on GBS and Mrs Campbell to be presented this spring by H Clay Blaney-A J Pocock, if successful will move to Broadway... George Sherman to direct Gallenhumor.

Special Events

Donnell Library Center, 20 W 53, features display of Comedie Francaise materials... Rep John Lindsay(R-NY) saluted 10th anniversary of Circle in Square Feb 26 in "Congressional Record". He also unveiled plaque presented to group by Greenwich Village Chamber of Commerce.

Theatre TV Notes

Feb 27 WNTA(NY) Play of the Week is double bill of Sartre's No Exit and Cocteau's Indifferent Lover ... Frederic March to star in "Life and Works of Eugene O' Neill" next season.

Theatre Book Notes

"The Business of Show Business" by Gail Plummer, Univ of Utah, published in may by Harpers.

DIGESTS OF CURRENT NYC THEATRE REVIEWS

Come Blow Your Horn- Atkinson- 2/22. 5 pros and 2 cons- Herald Tribune, Mirror- filed on new comedy on the artificial fruit industry by Neil Simon, presented by Mike Ellis-William Hammerstein, directed by Stanley Prager, with Hal March, Sarah Marshall, Lou Jacobi, Warren Berlinger. It was tested last summer at Ellis' Bucks County Playhouse, New Hope, Penn. Affirmative majority views were diverse ranging from all-out approval of all elements to okay only for performances of Jacobi and Berlinger. Most noted that comedy was loudly enjoyed by first night audience. Negative voters also split on reasons, one panned it, while other just didn't think it strong enough. Pro side headed by Taubman, Times, approved of slick, funny, lively comedy, smoothly plotted, deftly written with some explosively hilarious moments rooted in character. Chapman, News, liked modest, warm-hearted, amusing comedy by author with nice knack for writing individual comedy scenes. Aston, World Telegram & Sun, raved over comedy sleeper of season, in its own small way a masterpiece by writer who knows how to raise a shriek of laughter every third line, competely nuts and banging with laughter. Milder in tone were pro notices of Watts, Post, and McClain, Journal American, both of whom noted comedy was fun, but not as funny as first night audience thought it was. Former admitted with a certain amount of reluctance that much of it is entertaining, in a manufactured, heavy-handed, laborious play that has a brightness in it and is vastly helped by the excellent and zestful performances of an expert cast. Latter noted that first comedy by new writer still seems under eye of TV camera in play shy on narrative but with abundance of solid yoks, and some very adept character delineation. Dissenter Kerr, Herald Tribune, reported blockbuster response to jokes whether they were satisfying, seedy or so-so, but feared except for masterful comic performances by Jacobi and Berlinger play is corny, and makes one yearn for the years of Anne Nichols' maturity. Coleman, Mirror, couldn't find much of a play, but though he did admire excellent cast of farceurs, concluded with regret that it did not add up to quite enough humor in his book.

Once There Was a Russian-Music Box-2/18- 2/18. 2 pros- News, Journal American- and 5 cons- filed on new Samuel Spewack play on meeting of John Paul Jones and Potemkim, presented by Key-Segal-Schwartz-Howard-Randall-Sturm, directed by Gene Frankel with Walter Matthau, Albert Salmi, Julie Newmar. Play closed after its first and only performance. Two pro reviewers found the comedy intelligent and entertaining, while negative reviewers generally found it dull. Chapman, News, enjoyed both the intelligent, entertaining comedy and the fine farcical performances. McClain, Journal American, approved of frothy, amusing comedy, wonderfully well-performed, with some delightful characters. Negative aisle-sitter Taubman, Times, panned it as ponderous, formula-ridden farce, making historical figures the commonplaces of Broadway. Crist, Herald Tribune, marked it a dull, one joke evening in which Matthew and Francoise Rosay were superior, and Salmi and Newmar flat. Coleman, Mirror, tabbed it a dullie, like an old fashioned song and dancer without song and dance. Watts, Post, could find little wrong, except that it never quite came to life. or is ever more than intermittently amusing. Aston, World Telegram Sun, thought it more drollery than drama, quip than quake.

"CD" Subscribers are invited to inquire further for more specific data on current reviews, back reviews and out of town tryout reviews via mail, phone or drop by for coffee and facts when in NYC

OFF BROADWAY WEEK

Comedie Francaise-City Center 2/21. 7 pros filed on first bill of repertory program consisting of Moliere's Les Fourberies De Scapin and the curtain raiser L'Impromptu De Versailles, both directed by Jacques Charon. Three week NY visit presented by S. Hurok. Reviewers generally voiced mild approval for curtain raiser but all cheered the wild farce of the short three act comedy and especially the 20th century characterization of the title character by Robert Hirsch. Taubman, Times, noted that in Scapin every comic point is hammered home, visually and aurally, though perhaps played too broadly even for farce. Kerr, Herald Tribune, applauded all the fine comic performances, while he rated Hirsch's the surprise of the evening. Chapman, News, nominated Hirsch to niche of best pantomimic comedians such as Chaplin and Cantinflas, as well as a first rate set designer who did sets and costumes for both playlets. Coleman, Mirror, added that Hirsch was nothing less than magnificent as actor and acrobat, employing business that challenges the eye to follow it, speaking three times faster than most actors you ever heard. Watts, Post, okayed both plays done with gusto, relish and freshness. McClain, Journal American, thought curtain raiser more a document than a play, but rated complete bill a glittering import that will brighten the season. He also approved of the translation as almost verbatim. Aston, World Telegram & Sun, raved about the entertainment of cavilar quality at economy prices. Translation via transistor radios was by John S. White.

Double Entry- Martinque (32nd & Broadway) 6 pro- Times, Herald Tribune, News, Post, Journal American-and World Telegram & Sun- filed on twin bill of short musicals by Jay Thompson, presented by Albert Lasher-Paul Lehman-Happy Medium, staged by Bill Penn, with Rosetta LeNoire, Jane Connell, Garrett Morris, Doreese DuQuan. Unanimous approval was shared by cast, composer and director for pleasant musicals, though several had minor reservations on music and lyrics, both by Thompson. Taubman, Times, applauded Thompson who is developing a personal style of musical theatre, though he warned of certain lapses of taste. The Bible Salesman opener Times man marked as little opera with undistinguished recitative but gay bits of jazz, while longer The Oldest Trick in the World starts with comic freshness, but drifts in mid-career. Morgenstern, Herald Tribune, felt material was thin at times, but provided a zestful production by a group of inordinately talented entertainers. Davis, News, enjoyed pleasing twin bill. Herridge, Post, filed rave for outstanding talents of LeNoire and Thompson who together make a delightful evening for those who enjoy opera and quality musical theatre. McClain, Journal American, extended his rave to all departments in tip-top entertainment with five gifted players and Thompson's bright new musical talent. Aston, WTS, wished music had simpler melody, but joined critical parade for cast.

Connelly vs Connelly-Blackfriars' (320 W 57) 2/18. 3 pros- Times, World Telegram & Sun, Journal American- filed on new play by Rev Brendan Larner about 1845 British founder of Society of the Holy Child of Jesus presented by Blackfriars Guild, directed by Michael Kray with Adrienne Hazzard, R E Buxton, and Robert Milton. Trial scene and Hazzard's portrayal were recommended by all in interesting religious play. Esterow, Times, found much of it interesting and the final act lyrical. McClain, Journal American, recommended pleasant and provocative evening. Aston, WTS, was profoundly moved by Hazzard and one of the most moving dramas yet seen at Blackfriars.

GREEN ROOM DEPARTMENT

FRENCH VISITORS... Times and Herald Tribune editorials welcomed second visit of "Comedie Francaise". The former cheered elegant and scintillating theatrical art of company which will grace City Center, the actors interpret their roles with a mastery which is the culmination of lifetime devotion to the art of the spoken word. Latter shouted hearty welcome to France's first theatre which should bring joy to the city's French students, theatre lovers and connois - seurs of things Gallic.

COLUMN TIPS... Betty Grable sought by George Gobel for Three Men on a Horse musical next year, whispers Wilson, Post... Differences with directors, not "ill-ness" reason Ed Kenney returned to 13 Daughters, hears Kilgallen, Journal American... Shelley Win-ters wanted to play in The Death of Bessie Smith but could not arrange the proper time, notes Lyons, Post.

6 PM OPENINGS... Six PM opening night curtain suggested by McClain, Journal American, who can conceive of no complainers except maybe the stagehands. Pro-ductions would end about 8 30 PM and the audience, critics included, could go for a leisurely dinner at home or at a restaurant. Critic feels he too is en - titled to a dinner hour and not one at 5 30 PM for a 7 PM curtain.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS... The Tiger Rag , which drew seven cons from daily reviewers, could conceivably get ex-cellent grades uptown with hard cutting and sharpen-ing, views McHarry, News... Two great theatrical mir-acles of season are Zero Mostel turning into a Rhino ceros and Nichols and May turning from children in-to adults right in front of your eyes, lists Crosby, Her-ald Tribune... TV performances by Edith Evans in Time Remembered and Julie Harris in The Heiress termed superlative by Atkinson, Times. Nothing on Broadway this season has provided civilized parts that could support such marvelous acting.

LEGIT NEEDS... More light so the audience can see the eyes and facial expression of the actors, more discipline of actors in speech , dress and on-stage manners, and a Dept of Arts and Sciences in the President's Cabinet were a few of the ideas urged by Lillian Gish at "Drama Desk" Feb meeting. She told the NY theatre editors and reporters group that her first lesson in the theatre was to speak loud and clear so the last row of the balcony could hear, and never to stand in front of another actor blocking the audience's view. Currently featured in All the Way Home actress believes that musicals are popular today because they are brightly lighted, while most dramas make actors look like basset hounds.

DRAMA MAIL BOX... Many persistent but very bad writers have written elsewhere besides Sardi's for years without visible gain, Herald Tribune reader answers Crosby, Herald Tribune, recent charge.

SECOND GUESSES... The Moon in the Yellow River added two week-end pro views from Watts, Post, and Kerr, Herald Tribune. Post aisle-sitter rated Irish play a masterpiece of modern theatre, while Herald Trib-une man felt 1930 play strikes the mood of 1961 per-fectly.

PROS & CONS BY TMK

Comedie Francaise debut NYC bill of two Moliere plays- L'Impromptu de Versailles and Les Fourberies de Scapin provide a delightful introduction to the immaculate acting skill of the famed and lively company of expert com-ics. An outsider can hardly argue with the choice of plays, both in the repertory for over 300 years. The curtain - raiser is a charming introduction to Moliere's philosphy, deftly performed, filled with inside gossip of 17th century "show-biz." Scapin in the person of Robert Hirsch is a masterpiece of comedy, an unusual performance combin-ing acting and acrobatic skills, supported by excellent , funny characterizations all done in the best farce style , but always with every element under complete control . American actors and directors must attend and study this performance for it is what many try and few do well. Fans will just have fun at the wild comedy.

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Double Entry is a pleasant evening of aimable musical theatre with a talented group of Negro and white singer-actors presenting some light -weight material that never makes up its mind if it wants to be jazz or opera. Author-composer Thompson writes very funny lyrics to his jazz tunes, though his dialogue is uneven and his plotting predictable. But as a showcase for its exceptional players it is perfect pleasant and painless.

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The Tiger Rag is simply a very amateur product-ion of a pretentious script attempting indeed to be a mod-ern musical version of "Oedipus", with slices of " Peer Gynt" and "Three Penny Opera" thrown in for padding. The level of the performance is nil, the cast mumbling to themselves and the stagehands for fear the audience may hear them. The scope of the ambitious enterprise can be admired for sheer nerve, but the writing is neither clever, witty or particularly interesting.

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Three loud bravos for three year old Caroline Kenn-edy who saved the month for the Chief Executive's family as the nation's No. One "Theatre-goers." President Kennedy's first month in office was marked by, among other things, two visits to the films, none to the theatre. But Caroline attend-ed Winnie the Pooh last week-end at Roosevelt High School, in a production presented by the Washington Junior League.

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6 PM opening night curtain plea suggested by Mc - Clain, Journal American, has been soundly ignored by the entire theatre industry, including the stagehands. It is a perfectly wonderful idea which if extended to a once a week basis could only help all concerned. With alternate shows giving once weekly 6 PM curtains many a show would get that extra audience needed to remain running, theatre buffs could see an extra show during their week's stay in NYC, the working actors could get to see many more productions, the resturants catering to theatre -goers would have a second sitting after 8 30 PM, and everyone would find transportation easier. Except for the fact that theatre, like everything else, is in a rut, who would be against such a convenient plan?

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OUTER BROADWAY THEATRE LETTER

College Theatre

Schools of drama were panned by Eric Bentley, Columbia University, at commeration lecture of 50th anniversary of founding of the Brander Matthews Dramatic Library at Columbia. While the university is the only place where the theatre can maintain its standards, all the college theatres do, by and large, is to give bad presentations of successful Broadway plays. It's amateur night every night in the university theatres, he concluded, Times reports.

Repertory season of Association of Producing Artists at McCarter Theatre, Princeton Univ, NJ, cheered by Taubman, Times, as an experiment that could be of momentous significance to the US theatre. It deserves the support of all those with a stake in-and affect for-the theatrical profession.

Winter Repertory

Airline strike added to woes of San Juan Drama Festival season. Currently playing The Man Who Came to Dinner with Walter Abel and Paulette Goddard, producers do not know if casts for future Death of a Salesman and Gigi will arrive. Herbert Machiz directs, when and if.

Shadow of an Eagle a new play by Ramsey Yelvington being presented this week at Dalls Theatre Center where author is in residence... Tiger at the Gates to be produced Mar 7-Apr 2 at Arena Stages, Washington. D. C. ... Personal Appearance with Martha Raye Raye and Jody McCrae being presented at Sombrero Playhouse, Phoenix... Marriage Go Round with Constance Bennett and Hugh Marlowe current bill at Drury Lane, Chicago... Roman Candle with Arlene Dahl, recently in Palm Beach, Fla, may be presented in Los Angeles and San Francisco. ... Montreal Repertory Theatre presenting final bill of season Henry IV directed by and featuring Leo Cicero.

Playhouses

Parsons Theatre, Hartford, Conn, being demolished as it is in path of new East-West Highway.

Summer Playhouses

San Antonio Starlite Musical Theatre to present ten week season produced by Will Hussang, currently in Becket. Outdoor productions will be at Sunken Gar lens Theatre, Breckenridge Park... Williamstown Theatre Foundation planning eight week season at Adams Memorial Theatre, Williams College Campus.

A Majority of One starring Molly Picon to tour this summer, produced by Stephen Slane, North Shore Music Theatre, Beverly, Mass ... Take Me Along a package with Dan Dailey to be presented at Oakdale, Conn, Musical Theatre.

Fourth annual Musical Arena Theatre Assn. Theatre Management Course to be presented four Sats at Dance Players Studio, 1233 Sixth Av, NYC, starting Apr 8, $50 fee. Data from MATA % Lutz & Carr, 122 E. 42nd St, NYC.

Shakespeare

American Shakespeare Festival season opens with Twelfth Night for student audiences at $2 top Apr 10-May 27. Regular season starts June 15 and 16 with Macbeth starring Pat Hingle and Jessica Tandy and As You Like It. Latter in season Troilus and Cressida will be added to repertory.

Road Shows

The Sound of Music national company starring Florence Henderson presented preview in NY for the original cast and friends prior to Feb 27 opening in Detroit. O'Brian, Journal American, applauded marvelously effective ensemble and raved about Henderson's superb, enchanting performance.

Latin America

Stanley Richards to lecture for third semster on US State Dept grant on American theatre in Brazil Mar 1-Jun 30.

Europe

The Rogue of Bergen, a new play by Carl Zuckmayer to be one of 35 presentations during Austrian Drama Festival. Spectacular production will be presented on a barge on Lake Constance Jul 21-Aug 20.

Australia

J. C. Williamson to present this season--Bye Bye Birdie, Irma La Douce, Miracle Worker and Under the Yum Yum Tree.

London

The Connection drew split reviews at Duke of York's opening, but was booed by audience, some of whom left before play's end. For London production scene of Jack Gelber play was set in the London theatre itself, in which the US "junkies" have been imported to improvise a play about drug addiction.

The Changeling, 1622 play by Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, presented in London for first time in 300 years, "revived" at Royal Court, staged by Tony Richardson with Mary Ure... The Lady from the Sea new translation of the Ibsen play by Ann Jellicoe to be presented Mar 13 at Queen's with Margaret Leighton... Under the Yum - Yum Tree to be presented this spring by Fred Brisson-Harold Fielding.

US and Canadian members will join newly formed D'Oyly Carte Opera Trust Company, while the Bridget D'Oyly Carte Company will present operas only.

Paris

Fifth "Theatre of Nations" season Apr 8-Jul 8 to present 34 companies from 25 nations in three theatres. Theatre items include-- Royal Court Theatre, London in Card of Identity, Seargeant Musgrave Dance, Platonov... Theatre Eslava of Madrid in Yerma... Vachtangov Theatre of Moscow in The Inspector General... National Theatre of Cario in For Our Earth... US-ANTA trio of plays-The Skin of Our Teeth, The Glass Menagerie, The Miracle Worker; The Connection production of The Living Theatre... Seven Company of Rio in Mamembe... Theatre Shiki of Tokyo in The Lark.

Earphones provide translations of productions in four languages.

Tryout Calendar

Big Fish, Little Fish-Locust, Philadelphia 2/27

Devil's Advocate- Forrest, Philadelphia 2/21

Far Country- Shubert, New Haven 3/1

Happiest Girl in World-Shubert, Philadelphia 2/27

Information formerly on "CD" chart available by mail, phone or in person to CD subscribers.